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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 000517

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS -- NEW THRESHOLD RULE
IMPACTS SMALLER PARTIES

REF: JAKARTA 487 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Pol/C Joseph L. Novak, reasons 1.4(b+d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: New Indonesian electoral rules require that a party win at least 2.5% of the national vote in order to enter Parliament. Before this rule, there was effectively no limit. Looking ahead at the April 9 legislative elections, it seems likely that a number of relatively well-known parties will not make the new limit, including some currently with seats in Parliament. This includes a couple of Christian parties and perhaps one or two Islamic-oriented parties. The new rule also creates a real hurdle for new parties trying to enter Parliament. The purpose of the rule is to streamline the Indonesian electoral system by cutting down on the number of parties. END SUMMARY.

ELECTION THRESHOLD AT 2.5%

¶2. (U) Indonesia's new electoral rules provide that parties must win at least 2.5 percent of the national vote in order to enter Parliament (DPR). The rules were implemented as part of an omnibus election law passed by Parliament in March ¶2008. Before this rule, there was no effective limit and parties that won relatively small percentages of the national vote were permitted to send representatives (even just one) to Parliament. The explicit purpose of the new rule is to streamline the Indonesian electoral system by cutting down on the myriad number of parties.

IMPACT ON SMALLER PARTIES

¶3. (SBU) Ahead of the national legislative elections on April 9, smaller parties are facing the full impact of this rule. Indonesia does have a myriad of parties, with 38 parties registered nationally (plus six in Aceh). Based on recent polls, only a few parties (perhaps 7-8) appear capable of crossing the 2.5% threshold and winning seats in the DPR (currently 17 parties hold seats there).

¶4. (C) At this point, several parties that have held seats in Parliament for years look like they may not make it. These include one Christian-based party (see below) as well as some Islamic-based parties, such as the Crescent Star Party (PBB) and the National Awakening Party (PKB) (this latter party has been riven by feuds). The 2.5% threshold is also a considerable hurdle for new parties to cross. Gerindra, a new party led by Prabowo Subianto, a former general, may make it, for example, but Hanura Party led by former General Wiranto quite possibly will not.

¶5. (SBU) Although smaller parties may be shut out of Parliament, they may still have an impact on the presidential election in July. In order to be nominated and get on the ballot, candidates need either the support from a projected

20 percent or more of the seats in Parliament or the support of 25 percent or more of the popular vote (based on the results of the April legislative elections). To get to these figures, parties invariably form coalitions and even parties that don't make Parliament can throw their popular vote totals into the mix for some candidate's effort to make the presidential ballot. (Note: Three to four candidates are expected to gain the requisite support and to get their names on the July ballot.) This gives smaller parties at least some influence on the system.

TOUGH SITUATION FOR CHRISTIAN PARTIES

¶6. (SBU) Christian parties may well feel the effects of the threshold rule. There are two major Christian-based parties in Indonesia: the (Protestant-based) Prosperous Peace Party (PDS) and the (largely Roman Catholic-based) Indonesian Love Democracy Party (of the two, only PDS currently has representatives in Parliament). These parties received under 2.5% of support in the 2004 election and are not doing well in the polls now. One PDS contact told us that his party is working hard to try to make the 2.5% threshold and has hopes that it can do so.

WILL THERE BE VOLATILITY?

¶7. (C) Few question the overall purpose and rationale for the 2.5% threshold. Indonesia has way too many parties, and--in part due to this--the system lacks coherency and is too defuse. There are some concerns, however, that the limit could lead to tensions in the aftermath of the elections as members of parties that failed to make the cut take their

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frustration to the streets. Indonesian elections are usually relatively peaceful and there are not deep concerns that April will be particularly volatile here (see reftel for that assessment), but the new threshold creates some uncertainty. The national Election Commission has urged parties to fully respect the results and, if they run and lose, to try again in the future.

HUME